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Date: June 19, 2003

Contacts: Bob Wagner, (360) 902-9591
Kristin Alexander, (360) 902-9307

State's Average Annual Pay Rises Slightly Minimum Unemployment Benefits to Increase

OLYMPIA – The average annual wage in Washington state grew 1.9 percent last year to \$37,940, according to information released today by the Washington State Employment Security Department.

On a weekly basis, the state's average was \$729 in 2002, up 2 percent from 2001.

The average wage is used to compute weekly unemployment insurance benefits for jobless workers. The minimum weekly unemployment benefit amount, 15 percent of the weekly wage, will increase from \$107 to \$109 starting July 1. Because the maximum weekly benefit has been capped by the Legislature, it will remain at \$496.

During 2002, the Employment Security Department paid \$1.7 billion in regular unemployment benefits to 281,000 claimants.

In addition, the department paid \$88.5 million to 43,000 claimants under a state-federal extended benefits program. Another \$550.5 million was paid in federally funded extended benefits to 113,000 claimants. The average weekly payment was \$305.

The \$37,940 average wage used to calculate unemployment benefits does not include federal civilian workers and some other employees. When all workers are counted for, the average wage was \$38,252 in 2002 based on preliminary figures.

